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Thus for the past ten years the number of collisions was as shown in the second line below, the number of derailments as in the third, and the number of broken bridges as in the fourth:—

1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882
392	260	278	279	268	220	310	437	536	581
815	655	840	655	581	481	557	597	857	742
19	33	26	20	21	21	17	16	44	38

While the length of railroads increased from 70,000 miles in 1873, to 110,000 miles in 1882, the whole number of accidents decreased steadily, from 1,283 in 1873, to 740 in 1878, and then increased to 1,365 in 1882; while the number of collisions ranged from 392 in 1873, to 220 in 1878, and then steadily increased to 581 in 1882. Moreover, this increase in collisions is shown very plainly to be due to the crowding of the tracks, as the butting collisions range from 102 in 1873, to 70 in 1878, and from that number to 160 in 1882; while the rear collisions run from 187 in 1873, to 142 in 1878, and from that number to 388 in 1882. Comparing the accidents month by month, we find two periods when disasters are most numerous; viz., the first quarter of the year, and the three months August, September, and October. The accidents during the first quarter are very largely due to the extreme cold of that season,—the total disasters from broken rails in the ten years above having averaged six times as many during the first quarter as in July, August, and September. Indeed, we can always detect the unusually cold winters by the number of broken rails. The disasters of August, September, and October are supposed to be due to the crowded state of the roads during the excursion-season, when a large number of irregular trains are run.

It is hard, from the imperfect records at our command, to draw such definite conclusions as would enable us to improve the condition of affairs upon our railroads; but the statistics recorded by the *Gazette* are of great value as far as they go, and will eventually furnish the data we need for increasing the safety of railway-travel.

GEORGE L. VOSE.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

##### A caterpillar-eating hen-hawk.

IN July, 1882, my nephew Malcolm Storer, being at Moosehead lake, had the curiosity to examine the stomach of a hawk which he had shot there, and was surprised to find that it contained a large number of caterpillars in all stages of decomposition through digestion. Though the examination was made soon after the bird was shot, none of the caterpillars were found alive; but ten or twelve of them were perfect, and fifteen or twenty could still be distinguished as caterpillars in the mass of more completely digested matter. It was evident, moreover, that the stomach contained no other kind of food. The caterpillars were of green color, with yellowish rings or blotches, and were as thick and almost as long as a man's little finger. The wings of the bird, having been brought to Cambridge, were found to be those of the broad-winged hawk (*Buteo pennsylvanicus*). In view of what is known of the food of hawks, it is not at all strange that they should regale themselves upon

caterpillars when opportunity offers. The marsh-hawk (*Circus hudsonius*), for example, is said to be 'an indiscriminate feeder upon fish, snakes, and even worms,' and many other hawks are known to feed upon snakes occasionally, as well as upon lizards, in regions where they are to be had. The fact that both large hawks and small devour many insects, such as crickets and grasshoppers, has often been noticed.

F. H. STORER.

##### An Indian burial-mound.

At my request Mr. Frank La Flesche, an educated Omaha, made inquiries of the older men of his tribe about the burial of the famous Omaha chief Big Elk, who died about 1825. He writes me as follows: "In compliance with your request, I made inquiries about the mound made by the Omahas, in which Big Elk was buried; and was told that it was about as high as the shoulders of a tall man standing up, and that he was buried with great ceremonies. His favorite horse was strangled to death by his grave, and most of his horses and household goods were given to the poor. The place where he is buried is known by the Omahas as 'Big Elk's grave,' but by the whites as 'Black Bird hills,' as Black Bird was buried in the same place. It is said that Black Bird was buried with very little ceremony, as he died when the Omahas were being very much troubled with the small-pox; and he was not buried riding a live horse, as stated by some. A grandson of his is still living, and is about one hundred years old; and he thinks his grandfather died before he was born."

As we have very few reliable records of the erection of burial-mounds by Indians since the settlement of the country by the whites, the statements quoted above are of considerable importance; but these facts do not prove that all mounds are recent, or that all were made by the immediate ancestors of the Indian tribes which still erect mounds over their noted dead; any more than, for the same reason, they prove that the Omahas and other recent mound-building tribes are of the same stock with the ancient Greeks. The custom of raising a mound of earth or of stones over a grave is world-wide, and must not be taken for more than it is worth in archeology. There are so many kinds of mounds in this country, that it shows a limited experience in their investigation when a writer here and there asserts that they are all the work of the present Indians, or their immediate ancestors; and an equal disregard of known facts, when another as confidently asserts that they were all made by a people unlike and superior to the Indian race, and of great antiquity. Each earthwork, mound, and burial-place should be investigated and studied by itself. Side by side we may find earthworks entirely different in their character, and to be assigned to very diverse ages; so we may find burial-mounds of the same character near together, one of which may be so recent as to contain glass beads and other things obtained by the Indians from the whites, while the other may be of great antiquity. Their proximity will not in itself prove that they were made by the same people. Much careful and systematic work has yet to be done before the question so often asked, Who made the mounds? can be satisfactorily answered. By a proper study of the mounds and earthworks of North America, facts will at last be accumulated by which an approximate determination of their chronology and relation to existing peoples will be made possible. In this work the Peabody museum has been engaged for several years, and during the past season most important results have been secured. F. W. PUTNAM.

Cambridge, Mass., Feb. 19.